May 5, 1964

Terrible Tuesday

For folks in central Nebraska, May 5th, 1964 started out like any other day, but by sunset would be a day of total destruction. During the afternoon, a line of severe thunderstorms developed and quickly pushed through the region. Along its path, the line spawned numerous tornadoes, including an F4 tornado that nearly destroyed the town of Wolbach. But the biggest was yet to come. By 5 p.m., the line dropped a tornado just southeast of Hastings which quickly developed into an F5 on the Fujita Scale, the largest possible. The tornado trekked nearly 70 miles to the northeast, devastating everything in its path. Two fatalities occurred that night, along with numerous injuries. Several farmsteads suffered extensive damage, some with no buildings left standing.

Although the tornado swept through numerous counties, damage to the southeast portion of Hamilton County was by far the greatest. From south of Giltner near the Hamilton-Clay County line to east of Hampton near the Hamilton-York County line, nearly 3 million dollars in damage occurred. Over 42 farmsteads received damage, some with no buildings left standing, and over 100 livestock were killed in the path of this tornado.

Some Won’t Rebuild

Hamilton County Hit For $3 Million Loss

This map shows an approximate track of the tornado path as it swept northeast from its touchdown point in Adams County to near Bellwood in Butler County, where it lifted. This track was created by estimating the location of damage points as given by local newspapers covering the tornado at the time.

Left: Located directly in the path of the storm, roughly 4 miles east of Hampton on Highway 34, this farm received extensive damage. Sadly, the owners Mr. Clessen Turner and his daughter Mrs. Theodore Reed were the two fatalities that day.

Right: The Hilmer Peters farm, located 1 ½ miles east of the Hamilton-York County line, was totally destroyed. Mr. and Mrs. Peters and family got in their car and left before the storm struck. Not a building was left standing.

Right: Just days after the tornado, Park Aerial Surveys, Inc. took aerial photographs of the tornado track to the east and northeast of Nebraska. Loops across the land leave a scar as a painful reminder of the twisters destruction.

Right: The Hilmer Peters farm, located 1 ½ miles east of the Hamilton-York County line, was totally destroyed. Mr. and Mrs. Peters and family got in their car and left before the storm struck. Not a building was left standing.

Photo credit to the Aurora News-Register.

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3 Are Lucky to Be Living

Culvert Is a Refuge as Tornado Rages

As a World War II bomber pilot, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Peters of Nebraska’s Hillman Township was the only one who is thankful to be alive today.

His two companions should feel the same way.

Tom and his companions were driving through a heavy, black cloud shortly after 5 p.m. when they decided to pull into the ditch and cover themselves in a culvert. Two miles west of Bellwood on Highway 34

They were in the culvert when the tornado lifted across the part of Nebraska they were in.

Fifty feet away, the cloud pulled up a nearby house and demolished a house where Mr. Theodore Reed, 82, and his father, Clessen Turner, 81, resided.

Bodies Found

Mrs. Reed’s body was found by the boys in a field just south of the house that stood. Mr. Turner’s body was found by a corner of the foundation.

Mr. Peters’ family was traveling from York to his home in Grand Island, with Mrs. Walter Weglarz and Claude Welton, also of Grand Island.

“There wasn’t any funnel cloud or big black cloud,” Mr. Heible said.

“I just slid into the ditch up there on the highway and we all got into a culvert.

What happened after that?

“You got 50 freights travel together, and that’s what it sounded like,” he said. “That’s about as close as I ever tried to describe another one, too,”

The Peterss

He said that the three felt no motion in the culvert, but they were pinned in there pretty tight. It was just real tight. They searched about 45 minutes for dead and injured persons in the area and then hitchhiked home.

“We were wet and cold,”

M. Heible returned to the scene Wednesday and found his 1965 model car damaged. The tornado had rolled and carried it about 75 yards.

Mr. and Mrs. Peters and their three children also narrowly escaped injury or death. They lived across-the-northeast mile west of Mrs. Reed and Mr. Turner.

“I saw it coming when I walked out of the house,” Mr. Peters said. He and his wife loaded their children into the car, drove several hundred yards down the road, struggled through the trees and telephone pole falls on the car, then walked out the storm there. Their house also was demolished.